AIR QUALITY

Air quality has been a concern in the planning and construction of roads as early as the Federal Air Pollution Control Act of 1955. This concern continued with the passing of the Clean Air Act of 1970 which set standards on pollution control. This act was later amended in 1977 and more recently in 1990. The 1990 amendment set more stringent standards on mobile source emissions which impacted transportation planning by requiring transportation related provisions. These provisions promote integration of air quality analyses with the transportation process; requirements for determining conformity of transportation plans, programs and projects; expanded use of highway sanctions; and a renewed emphasis on controlling growth in vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) and reducing congestion levels. In addition, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 states further integration between state and local transportation planning is needed for conformity with the Clean Air Act.

When mobile source emissions exceed acceptable levels then the area is considered a nonattainment area. These areas must meet deadlines in reducing standard emissions levels. Even though federal law focuses on these nonattainment areas, the attainment areas are also important and should be aimed at remaining classified as such. Rockingham-Hamlet is an attainment area for all pollutants targeted in the 1990 Clean Air Act.

Emissions are reduced when traffic is permitted to flow more smoothly and congestion is reduced which achieves a more efficient use of fuel. Therefore, the design of the thoroughfare system has a notable effect on the amount of emissions because a well designed street network aims at reducing congestion and allowing free flow travel. A street system that provides direct movement between sections of the city reduces travel time and distances, subsequently reducing pollutant emissions. The Rockingham-Hamlet Thoroughfare Plan promotes free flowing travel and reduces congestion which both have a positive effect on maintaining acceptable levels of emissions.

WETLANDS

Wetlands are those lands where saturation with water is the dominant factor in determining the nature of soil development and the types of plant and animal communities living in the soil. Wetlands are crucial ecosystems in our environment. They help regulate and maintain the hydrology of our rivers, lakes and streams by slowly storing and releasing flood waters. They help maintain the quality of our water by storing nutrients, reducing sediment loads and reducing erosion. They are also critical to fish and wildlife populations. Wetlands provide an important habitat for about one-third of the plant and animal species that are federally listed as threatened or endangered.